

stress on the absurdity of pilgrimage to relics. In 1431 the Bishop of Bath and Wells proclaimed through Somerset that he would excommunicate any who should translate the Bible into English or copy any such translation. The spirit of rebellion against the Church was strong in some parts of this county, as at Langport, where, in 1447, the tenantry of the Earl of Somerset drove their priest from his office, stopped all his services, buried their dead for themselves, refused to do penance, beat the Bishops' officers when they interfered, and rid themselves of all ecclesiastical influence and jurisdiction. These were tenantry of the greatest lord of the Red Hose, acting under cover of their master's name and the license of the times.¹ (*See map*, p. 352.)

In East Anglia Lollardry was at least as widely spread as in the West, and was far more vigorously persecuted. In the reign of Richard the Second, Bishop Spencer had by timely threats kept the Poor Priests out of his diocese, or had at least forced them to act in such secrecy that Norfolk and Suffolk remained in outward appearance the most Catholic part of England.³ But when he passed away, and more careless shepherds took charge of his flock, the wolves came leaping over the fence, and his preserve was soon one of the parts most infested by Lollards. In the neighbourhood of Beccles, on the borders of Norfolk and Suffolk, great congregations were formed, Lollard schools started, and arrangements made with a certain parchment-maker for smuggling in the latest heretical tracts from the capital. This was about the time of the accession of Henry the Sixth.³ All was done without the protection or patronage of any powerful landowner, simply by the initiative of the middle classes of the district, searching for a religion suitable to themselves. In 1428 Bishop Alne-wick of Norwich determined to break up these congregations, and instituted proceedings for heresy against more than a hundred persons. It was natural that in a large community of men and women, to most of whom religion was only one among the duties and considerations of life, by far the

¹ Mr. Hunt's *Bath and Wells** Diocesan History Series, pp. 140-6; Correspondence of Bishop Bekington (B. S.), *ib.* 240.
 « Wals.. ii, 189. » ³ Foxe, iii. 585.